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CONSERVATION OFFICERS TO SAFEGUARD CONFEDERATION TRAIL

CHARLOTTETOWN, PEI
The Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry has hired two seasonal conservation officers to promote safety and enforcement of the law on Prince Edward Island's Confederation Trail, beaches, wetlands and other sensitive areas.

The two positions were created following a well-received pilot project that saw officers patrolling the province's trails, providing assistance to the public and identifying areas where trails have been damaged or are in need of maintenance.

Under the program, the two new officers, Chris Wagner and Jason Thistle, will be tasked with patrolling the Confederation Trail and other areas of interest.

"The presence of trails officers on bicycles lends an extra degree of security to the province's trail network and helps protect the system and its users from abuse," said George Webster, Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

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The officers will use mountain bikes in much of their trail work, but will also have access to ATVs to be used in patrolling areas where the off-road vehicles have become a problem.

They will be empowered as peace officers to enforce provincial and federal laws including the Off-Highway Vehicle Act, the Trails Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Wildlife Conservation Act and parts of the Criminal Code, the Highway Traffic Act and the Off-Highway Vehicle Act.

"Tourism PEI is very pleased to partner with the Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry on this initiative," said Valerie Docherty, Minister of Tourism. "My department has supplied the trail bikes and with the addition of these new conservation officers, it further ensures the safety of the trail. The Parks division continues to work very hard with other government departments and groups like Island Trails to develop and maintain a trail that Islanders and visitors can enjoy."

ATVs used by officers were supplied by the Department of Transportation and Public Works.

Grace Blackette of the Prince Edward Island Trails Association welcomed the hiring of the two new conservation officers.

"For years, I've helped coordinate the volunteer trail-patrol efforts through Island Trails Trail Officer Program. They've provided a valuable service of watching for vandalism, warning motorized vehicles off the trail and assisting trail users who are lost and in trouble," she said.

"The presence of two officers on our trails will strengthen the enforcement effort and make the whole trail system safer and more enjoyable for all users."

In order to allow the trails officers to access the Island's woodlands and back-country they will be issued all-terrain vehicles that have been equipped with special soft, low impact tires designed to minimize the vehicles' effect on terrain. When traveling the Confederation Trail, officers will be instructed to limit their vehicle speeds and have been told to stop and pull to one side of the trail in order to allow pedestrians and cyclists to pass.

Since the two officers began their work in May they have already made a difference in the use of the trail by unauthorized vehicles. From May 4 to June 23, the officers have laid 11 charges and issued seven warnings under the Off-Highway Vehicle Act and laid one charge under the Trails Act – six dirt bikes and two ATVs have been seized. In all, provincial Conservation Officers have laid over 40 charges and warnings under the Trails Act and the Off-Highway Vehicle Act.

Approximately one-quarter of the officers' time will be spent policing the Confederation Trail.

During the pilot project, trail officers helped protect the trail system and assisted users by providing directions, first aid and even transportation in cases where bicycles had become damaged.

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